CHAPTER XIII

THE SANCTUARY OF THE CITY LARES

In earlier times a street opened into the Forum south of the Macellum. Later, apparently in the time of Augustus, it was closed, and the end, together with adjoining space at the south, was occupied by a building which measures approximately sixty by seventy Roman feet.

In richness of material and architectural detail this was among the finest edifices at Pompeii. Its walls and floors were completely covered with marble. Now we see only rough masonry, stripped of its veneering, but enough vestiges remain to enable us to reconstruct the whole; in Figs. 41 and 42 both rear and side views of the interior are given.

Opening into the main room at the rear is a large apse (Fig. 40, 2), which gives to the building a peculiar character. In the inner part of the apse is a broad foundation about six feet high, on which stood a shrine (aedicula), containing a pedestal for three statues of not more than life size; the foundation projects in front of the pedestal, forming a table for offerings. A base of the same height as the foundation of the shrine runs along the walls of the apse; it supported two columns and two attached half-columns on the right, and the same number on the left.

On either side of the main room is a recess, ala, containing a pedestal for a statue of more than life size. The two entrances were flanked by pilasters nearly two Roman feet square, while each entrance was divided into three parts by two columns. There were three niches about six feet above the floor in each of the side walls of the main room, and two more at the rear; all were originally flanked by small pilasters which rested on a projecting base. The remains of an altar may still be seen in the middle of the room.

The height of both side and rear walls can be approximately computed from the existing remains, the basis of computation for the side walls being the thickness of the pilasters at the entrance. The rear part of the building was certainly not less than 45 feet high, exclusive of the gable, while the sides could not have been more than 30 or at most 35. This difference in height, taken with other indications, obliges us to conclude that the central room was treated as a paved court open to the sky; only the apse and the wings were roofed.

It is evident that we have here a place of worship, yet not, properly speaking, a temple. The shrine in the apse, with its broad pedestal for several relatively small images, presents a striking analogy to the shrines of the Lares found in so many private houses. Cities, as well as households, had their guardian spirits. The worship of these tutelary divinities was reorganized by Augustus, who ordered that, just as the Genius of
the master of the house was worshipped at the family shrine, so his Genius should receive honor together with the Lares of the different cities; thus in each city the emperor was to be looked upon as a father, the head of the common household. As the house had its shrine for the Lares, so also had the city; that in Rome was near the spot on which the arch of Titus was afterwards erected.

Undoubtedly we should recognize in this edifice the sanctuary of the Lares of the city, Lararium publicum. On the pedestal of the shrine in the apse the Genius of Augustus probably stood, represented by a statue of the emperor himself, with his toga drawn over the back of his head, offering a libation; on his right and on his left were the two Lares, like those represented in paintings (p. 271) and in the little bronze images so often found in house shrines.

In connection with the Lares the members of a family honored other gods, Penates, to whose special protection the head of the household had committed himself and his interests. As we shall see later, in house shrines diminutive bronze figures representing Hercules, Mercury, Fortuna, and other divinities are often found together with those of the Lares. It is quite possible that other gods were likewise associated with the Lares of the city; and perhaps here in the two chapels at the sides of the main room images of Ceres and of Bacchus were placed. Regarding the statues that stood in the eight niches it is better to refrain from conjecture. On the outside of the building, under the portico of the Macellum, was a small platform (4), the raised floor of which was reached by steps.

At the edge of the Forum in front of the building are eight square blocks of basalt, which still have traces of the iron clamps by which marble vencering was fastened on. These supported the columns of a portico which was joined with the porticos of the Macellum and the temple of Vespasian and took the place of the Forum colonnade. As the main room of the building was open to the sky, the portico also must have been without a roof; there is no trace of any support for the ends of the rafters at the rear. The columns in front, probably of two orders one above the other, were merely for ornament. Possibly awnings were at times stretched over the area of the portico as a protection against sun and rain.